



Enhancing the Lives of Rural Communities

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Position Statement: HBs 5711 – 5716 Agricultural Pollution Bills

The Michigan Farmers Union, a state-wide family farm and rural advocacy organization that has been active in Michigan since 1923, wishes to go on record in opposition to House Bills 5711 through 5716. We find this package of proposed legislation to be wholly without merit, and a threat to both the natural resources and well being of the citizens of this state.

Singling out agricultural operations for exemption from compliance with pollution regulations makes a mockery of our democratic form of governance. Farmers who consider themselves to be good stewards of air and water, resources universally shared with our neighbors, do NOT seek to be set apart from the collective responsibility we accept as the cost of living and working together for the common good. Furthermore, this blatant attempt to minimize the effectiveness of the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality as the principal agency charged with safeguarding our air and water has been carried out with a deliberateness, even malice, that is alarming.

This package of bills violates the federal Clean Water Act and associated case law, which threatens continuing federal funding of certain state programs. The proposed legislation also unnecessarily penalizes and threatens the health and welfare of rural residents and family farmers by appearing to reward polluters. Imposing unwarranted costs and penalties upon complainants, who are at the mercy of timely inspections for the purpose of verifying legitimate complaints, shifts the burden from the lawbreaker to the victim. Is the intention of bill sponsors and their supporters to intimidate good citizens into silence? Is this to be the new face of participatory democracy?

And finally, funds created under Michigan's Clean Water Initiative were properly intended for specified uses, as identified, none of which include subsidizing pollution originating from agricultural production. Pollution control and abatement is a cost of doing business, regardless of the kind of business. Agriculture is a business. Therefore, pollution control costs should be borne by the affected farming enterprise, not the taxpaying public, a business deduction computed against annual profits. Any segment of agriculture that seeks to elevate itself above the law and the norms of social equity risks increasing alienation from overall society, an alienation agriculture should not want.

It is for these reasons that the Michigan Farmers Union strongly opposes HBs 5711 through 5716 and requests that the bill sponsors withdraw these ill-conceived legislative documents from further consideration.